

Federal Regulators Threaten Net Neutrality and North Dakota's Entrepreneurs

It used to be the case that technology entrepreneurs had to leave Fargo, North Dakota to find opportunities, but today we have a booming startup community. But, as the founder of a small business in Fargo, I'm worried that federal regulators and big cable companies are about to put this growth at risk. All of us depend on access to an open Internet and will be harmed if the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rolls back its 'net neutrality rules.'

My company's story is a classic example of American entrepreneurship. I was frustrated by the existing software used for employee timekeeping. So, my friends and I sat down and built a better product. We now have a successful suite of apps used by thousands of organizations around the globe. We could do all of this with just a little investment -- \$100 from each from my two co-founders and me.

All of this would have been impossible without the open Internet. In one weekend, we could build the first version of our technology and then make it available to people all over the world. It didn't matter where our customers were or that we were in Fargo -- we could innovate, enter the market, and compete with minimal barriers to entry.

As a result of the proposed changes, Internet access providers could choose to slow down services like mine, while putting competitors' data into a prioritized fast lane. Startups may have to negotiate individually and pay new fees to Internet access providers, and they'll be at a disadvantage bidding against big incumbent players. And once Internet access providers start making money by selling certain companies a 'fast lane,' they'll have an incentive to make the rest of the Internet turn into a 'slow lane.' Your typical, basic broadband service will get worse and worse.

There are already many instances of cable and wireless companies trying to discriminate. For instance, Comcast's attempt to block and throttle competing video and file-distribution services was prevented by the current set of FCC rules. Now, the FCC would be giving these companies a green light to discriminate and pick and choose winners in the market.

Removing net neutrality laws risks stifling North Dakota's technology ecosystem and that of the greater Silicon Prairie. I strongly encourage the FCC to keep the current regulations in Title II intact.